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Working Paper No. 176

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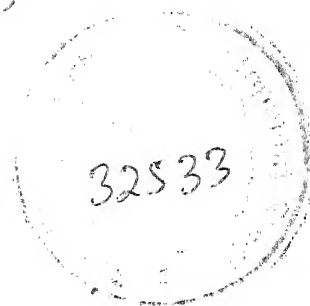
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7.373  
575  
1. Educational  
2. Secondary ed.




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SECTOR O, ALIGANJ HOUSING SCHEME  
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# A CRITICAL APPRAISAL OF THE NAVODAYA VIDYALAYA SCHEME

A. JOSHI & Y.P. SINGH

The concept of the Navodaya Vidyalayas evolved in the National Policy on Education, 1986. Its primary objective was to put to maximum use of human resources with a special focus on women, weaker sections, tribals and handicapped persons by providing good quality education, which such children were incapable of receiving by virtue of their inaccessibility because of locational or economic factors. The scheme was primarily the brainchild of late Mr. Rajiv Gandhi who used his public school background in the formation of the scheme. However, a similar experiment had been initiated by the Andhra Pradesh government during the mid-1970s by establishing co-educational residential schools. In these schools all children performing exceptionally well in Class VII were selected and provided education upto Class XII. Mr. Narsimha Rao who was the Minister for Human Resource Development in the Rajiv Gandhi Cabinet was also an integral part of the scheme. The scheme was therefore launched with the motto "Equity coupled with social justice." 'Nav' means new and 'uday' means dawn. Thus it was  hoped that the Navodaya Vidyalayas would usher in the new dawn in the field of secondary education.

Initially two schools, one each in Amrawati (Maharashtra) and Jhajjar (Haryana) were set up and Mr. Narsimha Rao personally monitored the functioning of these schools. Once it was felt that the schools are running properly, the scheme was speeded up. Consequently, from only 2 schools in 1985-86 their numbers went up to 83 in the very next year and to 209 by 1987-88. By 1998-99 the total number of Navodaya Vidyalayas was 408 and they were spread over 30 states and Union Territories. The scheme envisages that every district of the country should have one Navodaya Vidyalaya. The

Head Office of the Navodaya Vidyalaya Samiti is in New Delhi and it has eight Regional Offices under it which facilitate the Head Office in the smooth functioning of the Navodaya Vidyalayas all over the country.

In every Navodaya Vidyalaya the entry point is Class VI and to ensure proper representation admission is given on a block-wise basis. In order to make the selection equitable the following norms are followed:

- (a) *A reservation of at least 75 per cent of the seats for rural children;*
- (b) *At least 30 per cent reservation for girls; and,*
- (c) *At least 15 per cent reservation for SC and 7.5 per cent for ST children subject to a maximum reservation of 50 per cent for both the categories taken together.*

Admission is carried out on the basis of a test held on an All India basis by the NCERT and in order to have a fair admission so that the urban child does not enjoy any advantage the test is based purely on the IQ of the child. Children who have passed Class V and are in the age group 9-13 years are eligible for appearing in the admission test. All Navodaya Vidyalayas are residential co-education institutions and children selected for admission are provided free education from Class VI to Class XII. Everything is free such as boarding and lodging, uniform, textbooks and stationery, rail and bus fare to and from hometown to the school. On these items the government is incurring a direct expenditure of Rs.5,225/- per child per annum. Besides this the Navodaya Vidyalaya Samiti is also spending money on salaries of teachers and various other items of expenditure and during 1998-99 the total expenditure of the Samiti was around Rs.193 crores at the All India level. The CBSE syllabus is followed and a three-language formula is implemented. Another very unique feature of the education process is the scheme of exchanging students from one school in a particular linguistic region to another school located in a different linguistic region. This is the migration scheme and was conceived of

to develop the feeling of national integration among children. Under this scheme 30 per cent children of Class VIII from a Navodaya Vidyalaya of a Hindi speaking districts go to a Navodaya Vidyalaya of a non-Hindi speaking districts for one academic year. Similarly 30 per cent students of children in a non-Hindi speaking districts migrate to a school which is located in a Hindi speaking district. The scheme was also conceived of to develop Hindi as a national language. Besides imparting quality education to the children enrolled in these Navodaya Vidyalayas these schools are also expected to perform the role of pace-setting institutions by establishing a suitable interaction with the society around them and for educating the community in the vicinity of their location. They are expected to interact with the teaching staff, allow the local schools to avail the Navodaya Vidyalaya infrastructure such as science laboratories and play-field and create awareness about hygiene among the local community.

The state government is to provide 30 acres of land free of cost for setting up the school in the district where the Vidyalaya is to be located. Moreover, it is also to provide rent-free accommodation in the same district for a two-year period so that the school can function on this site till its own buildings are constructed. The total cost of construction of each Vidyalaya works out to around Rs.4-5 crore.

### **Growth of the Navodaya Vidyalayas**

Table 1 provides information pertaining to the growth of these Vidyalayas since the time of the inception of the scheme to 1998-99. It is very obvious from the table that after the year of inception when there were only 2 schools the number of Navodaya Vidyalayas increased quite rapidly for the next 3 years when 81,126 and 47 schools were established each year in the different parts of the country and the total number reached 256. After 1988-89, however, the growth was slow for the next three years. In fact during 1990-91



not even one new Navodaya Vidyalaya was sanctioned. Between 1992-93 and 1994-95 the growth picked up once again and then has declined to around 10 Navodaya Vidyalayas per year. At the end of 1998-99 there were a total of 408 Navodaya Vidyalayas all over the country. Uttar Pradesh, by virtue of its size had the largest number of 52 Navodaya Vidyalayas.

Table 1 : Growth of Navodaya Vidyalayas since Inception

Region	1985-86	1986-87	1987-88	1988-89	1989-90	1990-91	1991-92	1992-93	1993-94	1994-95	1995-96	1996-97	1997-98	1998-99	Total
Bhopal	--	12	19	9	--	--	2	12	3	1	1	2	--	--	61
Chandigarh	--	14	14	2	1	--	--	4	1	--	--	--	1	--	37
Hyderabad	--	17	28	9	1	--	2	--	4	--	--	--	--	2	63
Jaipur	1	7	12	1	--	--	1	7	--	5	--	1	1	1	46
Lucknow	--	10	9	10	1	--	6	8	--	2	--	--	1	5	52
Patna	--	7	15	1	1	--	2	2	6	3	3	4	4	--	48
Pune	1	10	17	2	1	--	3	6	5	--	--	--	--	3	48
Shillong	--	4	12	4	--	--	3	5	7	12	1	3	2	--	53
All India	2	81	126	47	5	--	19	44	26	23	5	10	9	11	408

Source : Navodaya Vidyalaya Samiti, New Delhi

### Performance of Children studying in the Navodaya Vidyalayas

The performance of the children of these Navodaya Vidyalayas in the CBSE Board Examinations of Class X and Class XII can be seen in Table 2. Since it is not possible to administer the functioning of the Navodaya Vidyalayas from the Head Office at New Delhi, there are eight regional offices located in different parts covering the country as a whole and it is from these regional offices that control over the functioning of these Vidyalayas are exercised. Table 2 clearly highlights the fact that in each of the years between 1995-96 and 1998-99 the pass performance of the children studying in Navodaya Vidyalayas has been exceptionally high (over 81 per cent) for both Class X as well as Class XII. As against this the overall pass percentage of the CBSE Board as such has been a much

Table 2 : Region-wise Results of Navodaya Vidyalayas

Region	1995-96		1996-97		1997-98		1998-99	
	Class X	Class XII	Class X	Class XII	Class X	Class XII	Class X	Class XII
Bhopal	82.2	80.4	81.8	84.1	84.2	78.3	80.9	88.9
Chandigarh	74.4	75.2	75.3	82.4	80.5	82.4	78.1	88.3
Hyderabad	94.0	94.2	92.9	94.4	92.3	90.9	90.6	94.3
Jaipur	81.8	82.0	83.6	90.7	82.4	82.4	86.7	90.2
Lucknow	80.5	70.7	89.2	76.9	89.4	79.1	85.4	79.6
Patna	82.4	72.5	86.6	75.1	90.0	75.0	86.6	82.9
Pune	88.3	89.0	89.0	89.3	90.0	81.9	88.5	90.5
Shillong	73.9	75.2	71.9	65.2	65.6	56.6	74.4	78.7
All India Average	84.0	81.5	85.0	85.0	85.8	81.2	84.7	87.5
Average Overall CBSE Results	64.2	72.0	64.3	73.3	63.2	72.6	64.2	74.4

Source : Navodaya Vidyalaya Samiti, New Delhi

lower figure. Among the eight regional offices the region whose performance has been not very notable is that of Shillong region. This is explained by the fact that this region comprises of the states of the North-East and their performance has been below par. As against this the best results for both classes have been displayed by the Hyderabad Region. Thus, it may be concluded that these Vidyalayas are not only selecting intelligent children but are also providing them good quality education and this is adequately reflected in the performance of the children in the CBSE Board examinations. One of the factors which ensures good results of these Vidyalayas is the fact that the teachers are all qualified teachers who are appointed through a proper selection procedure. In 1999 the strength of teachers was over 7000 in all the Navodaya Vidyalayas. Moreover, over and above the normal class room teaching the children are also provided help in their studies through the study time provided in the evenings and in the remedial classes which are specially held to allow the children who are weak to get over their specific problems.

These facilities are possible because all the Navodaya Vidyalayas are fully residential and not only the students but also the teachers have to stay within the school campus.

### **Some Shortcomings in the Navodaya Vidyalayas and Suggestions**

The state government has to provide 30 acres of land free of cost for the construction of the Navodaya Vidyalaya Campus. It is expected that the location must be appropriate from various angles such as approach road, medical services, availability of infrastructure such as electricity, potable water, postal, telegraph and banking facilities, etc. However, it is unfortunate that in a large number of cases the site selection has been influenced totally by political considerations and Vidyalayas have been constructed on land which was sodic or barren, on river beds or even on cremation grounds. Besides this even land under dispute has been allotted in some cases. The local MP or MLA has been exercising his pressure to get the school located in his constituency and this has adversely affected the location. Once an inappropriate site is selected nothing can be done to correct the same. Of late the Navodaya Vidyalaya Samiti has started exercising its power of discretion in site selection but even now some schools are being built on sites which are not very good.

The state government also has to provide rent free accommodation for a two year period so that the Navodaya Vidyalaya can function on the temporary site till its own campus is built. But in many cases while land is available the respective state governments are unable to provide a temporary site. Consequently the district remains deprived of a Navodaya Vidyalaya for years.

Since the scheme was launched in 1986-87, the schools, which are old, are faced with the problem of maintenance. The Principal does get funds for carrying out repairs



and maintenance but the procedure is so tedious that clearance is not given on time and the amount lapses. Many schools are such which require maintenance, particularly of the hostels, immediately otherwise there could be accidents and that would be unfortunate. Many of these schools also do not have a proper boundary wall and that causes problems of security particularly so because around one-third of the total strength of the students constitutes of girls.

When the Navodaya Vidyalaya scheme was initially conceived and launched the admission tests were designed purely on an objective basis to ensure that urban children do not enjoy any advantage. But that was in 1986 and things have changed considerably since then. Moreover, the interest of the rural segments is ensured by reserving 75 per cent seats for them. It is, therefore, felt that there is an urgent need to review the admission procedure. The objective type test is giving way to selection of a fair number of students who are extremely weak in studies and so even continuous efforts by the teachers through remedial classes prove in vain to lift their standards. It is because of these students that the ultimate result of the Navodaya Vidyalayas is on the lower side despite the fact that the results are much better than the overall CBSE results for both Class X and Class XII. It is, therefore, felt that some element of subjectivity must be introduced in the admission tests. Even the Janardhana Committee constituted in 1991 had suggested that the admission procedure must be reviewed periodically.

In order to give representation to the entire district in the selection procedure the reservation goes down to the block level. The reservation depends on the population of the block and so each block gets seats in the ratio of its population. However, in doing so the intelligent children get left behind because a block has higher number of seats by virtue of its population whereas the other block may have more children doing well in the

admission test but lesser number of seats. Thus, the basis should not be population but a minimum for each block so that children from all blocks do get admission.

Children in the age group 9-13 years are eligible to appear for the admission test. The upper limit of 13 years was appropriate 15 years ago when the rural children had lesser opportunities of education. But at present the number of primary schools have been established even in the remote areas and so the children have been getting enrolled at the proper age. Keeping this in mind the upper age limit should be reduced to 12 years. Moreover, whenever the Principal feels that the child is overage he or she should be properly examined medically to ascertain his or her age.

According to the procedure being followed, the admissions are done by a central body and they send a list of the selected children to the respective Navodaya Vidyalayas along with a few in the reserve list. In case a selected child informs that he or she will not be joining school then the children from the waiting list become eligible for admission. However, if a child shows willingness to join but does not do so later then his/her seat can not be transferred to a child who is on the waiting list. As a result of this the actual number of children who join Class VI is invariably less than the strength of Class VI and children who were on the waiting list get deprived of the opportunity to get free education.

The Navodaya Vidyalayas are following the policy of not failing children in the home examinations. However, if the child fails in Class X he/she is denied admission to Class XI. The rationale behind not failing children is that children undergo a series of successive evaluations through unit tests on a regular basis. Moreover, children not doing well enough also get a repeat the test to improve their performance. The scheme of remedial classes is meant for the benefit of such students. However, even after these provisions the performance of some children is not upto the mark and yet they are not failed. The

children as well as their parents are aware of this and so they do not bother to try hard enough to improve and do better. It is, therefore, felt that even this policy of not failing students needs to be reviewed.

The teachers of Navodaya Vidyalayas are overworked. As these schools are fully residential even teachers have to stay in the campus and shoulder responsibilities besides the normal teaching. Additional teaching responsibilities have to be handled in supervised studies and remedial classes. Besides additional teaching responsibilities the teachers have to work as housemasters, in the mess committee, supervise morning PT and afternoon games and other extra-curricular activities. Moreover, since the Navodaya Vidyalayas are invariably located in rural areas and in adverse locations the teachers have difficulty in the education of their children upto Class V. Besides this, they themselves have a rather dull life as they are at a considerable distance from an urban centre. In the Central School on the other hand, the pay scales are similar but the teachers have the sole responsibility of teaching during school hours. Moreover, they are entitled to a pension after retirement. This is not so in the Navodaya Vidyalayas and so the teachers change their job at the earliest opportunity. Although the overall percentage of teachers leaving the school is not very high at present, what is alarming is that they are mainly teachers of science subjects and these are hard to replace. Yet another problem is that teachers are not in full strength according to the actual number of sanctioned seats. In 1999 the total number of Post-Graduate and Graduate teachers was only around 89 per cent of the total sanctioned posts at the All India level. In the absence of these regular teachers the Navodaya Vidyalayas have to manage with ad-hoc teachers and teaching particularly in the science subjects tends to suffer.

One aspect, which is important, has been lying pending ever-since the inception of the scheme and that is the formulation of a condemnation policy. The old textbooks, uniforms, old bedding, broken furniture, etc. are lying dumped in the different schools and the Principal does not even have sufficient place to keep them. Even the old vehicles are no longer fit for repairing but a new one can not be sanctioned till the old one has been condemned. Thus, there is an urgent need to draw up the condemnation policy at the earliest.

At the time when the scheme of Navodaya Vidyalaya was conceived of it may have been appropriate to provide all facilities totally free. Over the years, however, the income levels of people have gone up and the children who get admission includes a fairly high percentage of children who come from middle or upper middle class families. Their parents have spent money on their education upto the primary level and will once again be doing so after Class XII. Moreover, even presently these children are given pocket money from their parents to spend and the clothing and footwear, which they bring to school, is of good quality. Keeping this in mind the Navodaya Vidyalaya Samiti can certainly think of asking parents to contribute at least partly towards the education of their children. Parents who are below poverty line deserve to get full exemption. The additional income generated by the Vidyalaya can be effectively utilized in various development activities of the school.